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SUBJECT: MALAWI: EIGHT NOMINEES COME FORWARD FOR PRESIDENT

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Eight candidates presented nomination papers to the Malawi Electoral Commission (MEC) and are officially running for President in the upcoming May elections. In addition to the "big three" - President Bingu wa Mutharika, former President and United Democratic Front (UDF) leader Bakili Muluzi, and Malawi Congress Party (MCP) leader John Tembo - one independent and four smaller parties submitted nomination papers. The MEC has until February 13 to determine the eligibility of each nominee, a process of particular relevance to Muluzi's bid. For the three major party candidates, the selection of running mates added drama to the proceedings. President Mutharika broke with tradition and picked a running mate from the same region, selecting Foreign Minister Joyce Banda. Bakili Muluzi selected Clement Stambuli, a young MP from the central region, while John Tembo, after a rumored attempt to woo a northern region cabinet minister, settled on 2004 presidential candidate and current UDF member Brown Mpinganjira. With nominations over, Malawi now turns its attention to the MEC and its decision regarding Muluzi's candidacy. End Summary.

Eight is Enough

¶2. (U) Eight presidential candidates submitted nomination papers to the MEC by the February 6 deadline. The MEC now has until February 13 to determine each nominee's eligibility. While the media has focused primarily on the three major party candidates - President Bingu wa Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), former President Bakili Muluzi of the UDF, and MCP leader John Tembo. Independent James Nyondo joined four smaller parties in submitting nomination papers. Notably, the New Rainbow Coalition nominated Loveness Gondwe, a northern region MP, as the first female presidential candidate in Malawian history. Dindi Gowa Nyasulu of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), Kamuzu Chibambo of the Peoples Transformation Party (PETRA), and Stanley Masauli of the Republican Party (RP) also submitted nomination papers for the presidency.

Higher Nomination Deposits Don't Deter Nominees

¶3. (U) Many parliamentary candidates objected to the MEC's decision to raise nomination deposits from \$35 USD to approximately \$700 USD, but ultimately the higher deposits failed to discourage potential candidates. Over 1500 turned in paperwork and deposits for parliamentary elections, an average of almost 8 individuals per constituency. The presidential field of candidates should be the largest in Malawi's history as well, topping the five who ran in 2004. Beyond the eight who submitted papers, another ten potential nominees collected nomination forms but failed to submit them. However, only a few complained that the deposit kept

them from proceeding. Instead, several used their paper submission time in front of the media to announce support for other candidates. Most notably, People's Progressive Movement (PPM) candidate Mark Katsonga Phiri, long a vocal critic of the current administration, announced his support of President Mutharika. Muluzi, for his part, was also able to keep his loose coalition together as the Maravi People's Party's Uladi Mussa, New Republican Party's Gwanda Chakuamba, and Malawi Democratic Party's Kalempo Kalua all chose not to run for President and announced support of Muluzi's nomination.

Running Mates Add to the Drama

14. (SBU) In a continuous game of cat and mouse, none of the major party candidates tipped their hands regarding their running mates. Muluzi, the first of the three to present his papers, chose Clement Stambuli, a two term MP from Nkhota kota along the central lakeshore. In 2004, Nkhota kota was the only UDF stronghold outside of the southern region. While Stambuli provides Muluzi with someone from the next generation of Malawian leaders, his connection to Nkhota kota will also counteract the growing influence of DPP Secretary General Henry Chimunthu-Banda, who is also from that district.

15. (SBU) John Tembo delayed his nomination submission six hours, due to indecision over his running mate. Tembo was reportedly ready to select Deputy Minister of Education Richard Msowoya as his vice president, a selection that would have made Tembo the only major party candidate to choose a running mate from the northern region. Reportedly, Tembo felt obliged to seek the blessing of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) - Nkhoma Synod, of which Tembo is

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a member. According to the press, the church leaders told Tembo they would not support a northern region running mate. The Synod leadership later dismissed the story. In the end, Tembo chose Brown Mpinganjira, the 2004 National Democratic Alliance presidential candidate and current UDF MP. The two had engaged in a month-long courtship that has once again estranged Mpinganjira from Muluzi. However, Mpinganjira has refused to formally leave the UDF and join Tembo's MCP, a sticking point that could have been equally likely for the delay.

16. (SBU) President Mutharika also kept his running mate pick a surprise until the end, choosing Foreign Minister Joyce Banda. The selection of Banda, who like Mutharika is from the Southern Region, goes against tradition. Historically, all successful presidential candidates have chosen a running mate from a different region to try to appeal to the entire nation. Banda, however, is known as a devoted advocate for women's rights which could help offset any perception of regional bias. Initial media reactions to the DPP ticket were positive, both for promoting a strong woman leader and for the DPP's effort to campaign on issues instead of regionalism. However, some analysts believe that the southern region tilt of the ticket will cost the DPP significant support in the north.

Comment

17. (SBU) Last week's nomination submissions were peaceful, and despite large crowds in Blantyre, there were no reports of violence. The next test will come in the next few days when the MEC rules on Muluzi's candidacy. Despite the fact that a negative decision will be immediately challenged in court, if the ruling is unfavorable, demonstrations are likely and sporadic outbreaks of violence are possible. End Comment.

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